

## VDH Table of COVID-19 Test Types

	PCR Test	Antigen Test	Antibody Test
<i>Other names</i>	<i>Molecular test</i>	<i>Rapid test</i>	<i>Serology test</i>
<b>Why is this test used?</b>	PCR tests look for pieces of the virus to determine active infection.	Antigen tests look for pieces of the proteins of the virus to determine active infection.	Antibody tests look for antibodies of the virus to determine if there was a past infection.
<b>How is this test performed?</b>	A nasal or throat swab is collected by a healthcare provider and usually the swab is sent to a lab for processing. Sometimes saliva is collected.	A nasal or throat swab is collected by a healthcare provider or sometimes by the person. Sometimes the swab is sent to a lab and sometimes the test is run quickly while you wait.	A blood sample is collected by a healthcare provider and usually sent to a lab for processing.
<b>What does a positive result mean?</b>	The person has an active infection.	The person has an active infection.*  * False positives can occur; if COVID-19 is not suspected, a PCR test should be done.	The person was infected with COVID-19 in the past and the person's immune system has developed antibodies to fight the infection.
<b>What does a negative result mean?</b>	The person was probably not infected at the time the person was tested. It does not mean they will not get sick - it only means that they did not have COVID-19 at the time of testing.	Viral proteins were not detected at the time the person was tested. However, a negative test is not always accurate. If there is still concern, the person should get a PCR test.	Antibodies were not found in the blood at the time the person was tested and the person was not exposed to COVID-19. It is possible that the person has been exposed if the test was done before the person had time to develop antibodies.
<b>When is this test helpful?</b>	This test helps to determine who has an active infection and identify who may be contagious to others. This test is considered the gold standard for diagnostic testing.	This test can be used to quickly determine an active infection. This test is less expensive than PCR. This test is best used when someone has symptoms.	This test helps to identify people who have been infected in the past. This test can also help determine who can donate plasma.

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<b>When is this test not helpful?</b>	<p>This test does not help determine who had a past infection.</p> <p>This test does not help determine if a person who was exposed will develop an active infection in the two weeks after exposure.</p> <p>In some people, the virus can only be found by PCR for a few days at the beginning of their infection. The test might not find the virus if the swab is taken more than a few days after the illness starts.</p> <p>In some people, the virus can be found by PCR in the nose and throat for several weeks or longer than the time they are contagious. This is why the CDC does not recommend retesting within 3 months of a positive test result.</p> <p>This test requires certain kinds of swabs that may be in short supply.</p>	<p>This test does not accurately rule out infection.</p> <p>Antigen tests are less sensitive than PCR tests, meaning there may be false negative results. False positive test results are also possible.</p>	<p>This test may be negative if it is used too close to the beginning of an infection, which is why it should not be used to detect active infection.</p> <p>We do not know yet if having antibodies provides protection from getting infected again or if it does, how long that might last.</p> <p>Until more is known, people with COVID-19 antibodies need to continue taking steps to protect themselves and others.</p> <p>Some antibody tests may cross-react with other types of coronaviruses, leading to false positive test results.</p>
<b>Where are these tests performed locally?</b>	<p>To find COVID-19 testing sites in your area, see:  <a href="https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-testing/covid-19-testing-sites/">https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-testing/covid-19-testing-sites/</a> </p>		

Adapted from Texas Department of State Health Services [www.dshs.state.tx.us/coronavirus/docs/COVID19-PCRvsSerologyTesting.pdf](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/coronavirus/docs/COVID19-PCRvsSerologyTesting.pdf)